

Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study  
William Nichols House  
also known as Timothy G. Clapp House  
15 Union Street  
Nantucket  
Nantucket County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1059

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
76D-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

ORANGE AND UNION STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY  
WILLIAM NICHOLS HOUSE  
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Location: 15 Union Street (on west side), Nantucket,  
Massachusetts

Present Owner: Scott M., Jr. and Jane B. Stearns

Present Occupant: Stearns Family

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy

Brief Statement  
of Significance: A particularly fine example of the typical  
Nantucket house; part of the Orange and Union  
Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1796 -- Richard Lake Coleman, house-carpenter bought land for \$440 from Josiah Barker and Jethro Hussey.
- 1803 -- William Nichols bought from Richard L. Coleman for \$2000 land with dwelling, etc.
- 1819 -- Benjamin Swain bought from Estate of William Nichols "land, dwelling house and outbuildings thereon standing" for \$1400.
- 1825 -- Timothy C. Clapp bought from Phebe Swain, widow of Benjamin Swain for \$1300.
- 1869 -- Eliza W. Mitchell, widow of Timothy G. Clapp, by deed from her sons Joseph W. and Henry P. Clapp.
- 1874 -- Joseph W. Clapp bought from David and Eliza W. Mitchell "whatever interest they may have" for \$100.
- 1913 -- Susan E. Brock, et al under will of Joseph W. Clapp.
- 1928 -- Mary McC. Taylor bought from Susan E. Brock, Bertha Hazard, Lydia C. Parmelee and Edward L. Parmelee.
- 1936 -- Dorothy Atkins bought from Mary McC. Taylor.
- 1946 -- S. James and Felicia A. Krygier bought from Dorothy Atkins.
- 1963 to date -- Scott M., Jr. and Jane B. Stearns from S. James and Felicia A. Krygier.  
(Abstract: Records at Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts.)

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2. Date of erection: Between 1796 and 1803.
3. Architect: Richard Lake Coleman was a house-carpenter who no doubt built according to his own plans.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: This house probably always had two stories both front and rear. The doorway is original and the house has a high basement. The facade is composed of four bays with door at one side of center approached by a high railed stoop with steps on the side.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: A walk has been added to the roof and an ell at the rear.

During the Taylor ownership many of the older features of the house were restored.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Union Street was laid out in the mid-1700's, when the sprawling settlement around the Great Harbour began to spread out, and "made land" was being utilized under Orange Street Bank.

Benjamin Swain bought the house in 1819 but died of "cholera morbus" a year later.

The Clapp family owned and occupied the property from 1825 until 1913. Timothy G. Clapp was a taylor who moved here from Rhode Island. One of his sons, Henry, operated a candlehouse on the east side of Union Street, while another son Joseph W. was a well-known islander and something of a historian, who at the turn of the century compiled a list of sea captains then living on Orange Street or who had formerly lived there. This list of 134 names was published in the Inquirer and Mirror and is remarkable as probably no other street in the world offers such a long list of captains as does this five-eighths of a mile of Orange Street, Nantucket.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph of house with text in Nantucket, a Camera Impression by Samuel Chamberlain, New York: Hastings House, 1939; photograph in A Mirror of Nantucket by George Allen Fowlkes, New Jersey: Press of Interstate, 1959; old photograph of Union Street in 106 Views of Nantucket by J. H. Robinson, 1911; Land Court Certificate 4893 on Plan 13785A, filed with Certificate 1783. (Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts)

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
August 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Typical early nineteenth century Nantucket house of two stories with an ell appendage to the rear, wood frame with shingle exterior, gable roof parallel to the street, roofwalk with off-center chimney.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent, with minor and tasteful modifications appropriate to its style.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 29' - 10" by 50' - 0".
2. Foundation: Brick wall to the street and in portions of the ell, coursed rubble elsewhere.
3. Wall construction: Wood frame, cedar shingles with 4" - 5" exposure.
4. Structural system: Post and lintel wood frame; exposed posts, girts and summer beams at second floor; ship's knees in basement do not appear to be functional or original.
5. Chimneys: Multi-flue brick chimney off-center, concrete slab cover with brick hoveling.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Carpenter classic doorway with fluted pilasters at each side, paneled entablature, dentil course, projecting cornice, fixed five-pane overdoor, six-panel door; plank door (continuous batten) in north doorway in ell.
  - b. Windows: Single hung windows, twelve-over-twelve, eight-over-twelve in basement foundation wall; projecting plank and board frame mortise and tenon construction, beaded edges; east windows at second floor project into house cornice, window cornices project outwards.
7. Stoop and porch: Wood entrance stoop, steps at right (north) side only, molded handrail, square newels, dowel balusters; vertical board panel between platform and sidewalk; stone paver at foot of steps.
8. Roof: Gable roof parallels street, asphalt shingle covering, boxed cornice, wood gutter, sheet metal necking between gutter and boxed wood downspouts, downspouts continue into leaders to cistern in the north side of ell. Two-bay roof walk with balustrade, scuttle in west slope next to chimney.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans (survey limited to first floor):
  - a. Entry from stoop into stairhall (closet and "buttery" at northeast corner reworked as extension of stairhall and bathroom), parlor at southeast corner, diningroom and stairways to basement and second floor at northwest corner, old kitchen in full basement, new kitchen and laundry at southwest corner; sitting room in ell, pantry-bar and exit to terrace at north side of ell.
  - b. Second floor consists of parlor chamber, diningroom chamber, ell chamber and bathrooms; one finished space in garrett.
  - c. Basement is divided into two spaces, store room to the north, old kitchen to the south.
2. Stairways: Front stairway is L-shaped, windcrs at second floor, square newel with three grooves each side, molded handrail, two balusters per tread, stringer decorated with scroll-sawed curvilinear pattern, wood panel wainscot, stairway continues to loft; secondary stairs simple, functional design.
3. Flooring: Pine boards of various widths nailed with cut nails, natural and painted finish.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted and papered plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: Simple carpenter classic surrounds, two- and four-panel doors are on both sides, fixed overdoor lights of four panes.
6. Decorative features and trim: Panel wainscot in parlor entry and diningroom with top rail framing window sills, beaded edges on posts, **girts** and summer beams at second floor. China closet at left of diningroom fireplace; parson's cupboard above sitting room fireplace.
7. Notable hardware: Strap hinges in doors at basement entrance, north wall; brass knocker at front door; wood blocklock (not original) in ell plank doors, thumb latches, H and HL hinges.
8. Heating: Fireplaces in principal spaces. Parlor fireplace has classic mantelpiece, brick construction; diningroom fireplace similar with two engaged columns at each side of opening, cooking crane in place; cooking fireplace in basement kitchen, flagstone hearth, brick reveal, oak lintel, cooking crane in place; round (Bee hive) oven in rear wall,

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iron door; wood storage. No heating system but fragments of gravity warm-air system remain. Telephone service from pole, electric service below grade to meter at north foundation wall.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:

The house faces east on Union Street, a small planting space between foundation wall and brick sidewalk. Fenced area at north of house, wood picket fence, brick sidewalks and terraces, stone steps and retaining wall; pump at cistern located north side of ell; service yard at southwest; dry stone rubble retaining wall at rear of property and at base of cut into Quanatay Hill, modern brick wall for pool at northwest corner of site.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
August 1970

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014) made in the summer of 1970 by the Historic American Buildings Survey on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fifth summer project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August, 1971.